Trading Spaces

One veteran HIVer becomes a first-time homeowner

June 1, 2004 By Nick Burns

Who: Robert Sheriff

What: Moving IN
Where: Spencer, Indiana
When: 3.27.04

When Robert Sheriff, 43, was admitted to the hospital with PCP and diagnosed with HIV in February 1996, his family feared that this lifetime renter faced the final eviction. But Sheriff survived, and seven years later, he bagged his first, 30-year mortgage on a new home. POZ *dodged the heavy objects as the Sheriffs unboxed the family goods.*

I was looking forward to being in the house but not moving into it. We just have so much to move! Being an auto technician, I have a lot of heavy tools that could squash me. I'm happy as a lark now that I've got everything over here. When I met my wife, Wilma, I told her that we would buy a house together—that was before I was diagnosed with HIV (she's negative). But we did it! She says we're never moving again. Our first night here, we went to bed, and it felt like we were in a hotel room. We didn't believe we actually owned something this nice.

Three years ago, when I was on Sustiva, I was so manic-depressive that I used to go shopping to pick up my spirits. Ten-thousand dollars of debt later, the best thing to do was declare bankruptcy and start over. As someone on disability, I thought I'd never be able to buy a house. We had to get our finances together by triming our budget, then find a mortgage company that would help us. It was all very sudden—we applied for the mortgage in February, and we were flabbergasted that the bank granted it. We were able to move in so quickly. Before, paying more than $3,000 for something was scary. And here we are signing up to pay off a loan that's gonna cost us more than $210,000.

I'll have my degree in applied science and automotive technology in September, so I plan to build a garage on the property and work from home fixing cars. Until I can do that, I'll have to find a part-time job to help pay for the house. Wilma says if we're paying for it for the next 30 years, I'm not allowed to die.

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